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Jane Fonda:

'I'm Just Like Most

People'

The LI Interview/By Larry Grobel

EXCERPT:

Q: *The CIA's infiltration of the mail recently made headlines. In October, 1973, you filed a \$2.8 million suit against the FBI and CIA for violating your civil rights by harassing you through overt and physical surveillance, burglaries and opening your mail. Could you explain your case?*

FONDA: The case is Fonda vs. Nixon. It began in 1971. I read in a Jack Anderson column that he [Anderson] had obtained part of my FBI file from one of his unknown sources. The FBI went into two of the banks that I had accounts in and obtained—without subpoena, illegally—every single financial transaction. It was the first time in the history of the Morgan Trust Co. in New York that that had ever been done, according to the director of the bank. The FBI told them it was a case of national security. My whole address book was there—it had been stolen and Xeroxed. People who were in the address book received visits from the FBI. I learned that six undercover agents had been reporting on my daughter's kindergarten. I was bugged, I was followed, I was illegally under surveillance and harassed. Itineraries of my travels were reproduced. So the ACLU has filed suit on my behalf. The defendants are almost all of the Watergate people, the FBI, CIA, the Bureau of Customs, two banks, and on and on. It's a classic First Amendment case: They violated my right of freedom of speech, travel, assembly, privacy. If you look through the file you see I've never broken the law, I don't have any misdemeanors; I've been accused of a lot of things—

but all the charges were dropped. And yet over \$1 million has been spent trying to screw me, in the words of John Dean. I don't think that any citizen should take that sitting down. What happened to our right to privacy? My case was the first one that exposed the CIA illegally opening citizen's mail in this country. It was when that happened the defendants in my case made a plea for us to be gagged, and the judge ruled in favor. It's almost unprecedented in its scope and breadth. We cannot talk anymore about what we're finding out in our affidavits and discovery motions; we cannot allow any of the information to go to congressional committees that are investigating the CIA and FBI. It's very heavy. The reason that we're going to all this trouble is since Nixon was pardoned by Ford these kind of civil cases are virtually the only way the American people are going to be able to dig into the roots of Watergate. Our view is that with the revelation of Watergate and the resignation of Nixon and the putting in jail of a lot of the Watergate cronies, the machinery, the repressive apparatus of what's called Watergate, was brought to a standstill. It has to be dismantled.



Larry Grobel, the LI Interviewer, is a frequent contributor to this magazine.